

By Joe Yonan

GLOBE STAFF

HART'S LOCATION, N.H. — Call it romance by proxy. I was so taken by the atmosphere at the Notchland Inn last winter that I felt the love even though I was there all by my lonesome.

My own most recent relationship had ended, after I reserved a room for two but before I made the trek to this 1860s granite mansion tucked in the White Mountains. No matter. I was determined to keep the date, even if the dating was in my fantasies — or memories.

Turns out, I could be as alone as I wanted — or not — which was a good thing as I sought a little bit of both. My first companion was Crawford, a Bernese mountain dog puppy who practically rolled down the hill to meet me as I lugged my bags in the snow. Crawford, who must be three times the size by now, reminded me of my favorite boyfriend substitute back home: my 10-year-old pooch, Gromit, who was spending the weekend with a house-and-pet-sitter who spoiled him in ways I hadn't since . . . well, since he was Crawford's age. (Somebody stop me before I make a "puppy love" joke.)

Then there was the friendly couple from Portland,

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CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP: PAM BERRY FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE; BILL REGAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE; JOE YONAN/GLOBE STAFF

Reveling in alone time with a good book by the fire

► NOTCHLAND

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Maine, I met on the snowshoeing trails that lead from Notchland into thousands of acres of forest. They weren't the type for dramatic displays of affection, which in my state of mind might have tempted me to push one or both of them into a snowbank. Instead, they seemed so truly comfortable in each other's company that I warmed to them immediately. They unwittingly helped remind

me what was missing in my most recent relationship, and made me feel better about its demise.

After a couple of hours tromping in the snow, stopping now and again to appreciate a view or a sound, I turned back and was almost sorry to leave them.

Almost, but not quite. It was time to build another fire in my room — all the rooms have fireplaces — and to maybe soak in the tub, read, have another nap. While the Portland duo was heading out in snowboots and robes to try the outdoor hot tub under a gazebo, and other guests were off to nearby ski resorts like Attitash, I reveled in some alone time.

The inn lost power a few times during the day, but it hardly mat-

tered to anyone except the innkeepers, who were no doubt frustrated in their cooking efforts. There's no TV, only one phone in the entire place, and no cellphone coverage, anyway. I could still read by daylight, or candlelight, or firelight, and there was plenty of hot water for bathing.

When I was feeling more social, I read in front of the fire in the Arts and Crafts-style parlor, which is stocked with puzzles, games, and CDs. Every so often Crawford or his mother, Abby, would come by for nuzzling. The Portland couple stopped for a bit, too, and we chatted amiably about a common interest: restaurants.

Come dinnertime, I sat alone, all the better to pay attention to

the soothing food that innkeepers (and partners) Ed Butler and Les Schoof dished out. Besides, I was devouring my book: Anthony Trollope's "The Way We Live Now." It's hardly a romance, unless you find biting satire romantic, but that, even in the candlelight, seemed just right.

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Notchland Inn
Route 302
Hart's Location, N.H.
603-374-6131; 800-866-6131
www.notchlandinn.com
Rates: Doubles \$195-\$340.
Includes full country breakfast.
Five-course dinner, \$35.

